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ABSTRACT

Professional development is an essential part of effective organizations, challenging policymakers and educators to create conditions conducive to student and teacher learning in each school. Tennessee's State Board of Education adopted a policy, consistent with the Education Improvement Act, pertaining to professional development which provides a framework recognizing the professionalism of teachers and administrators. The policy is designed to enhance the capacity of local school systems to provide professional development in each school emphasizing educational outcomes. This Professional Development Policy statement gives schools and school systems flexibility and responsibility for achieving results; recognizes that professional development is an essential ingredient in the continuous improvement of schools; outlines the role and responsibility of schools, the school system, and the state; offers a rationale for promoting professional development; identifies areas of focus and characteristics of effective professional development; discusses the role of other organizations including institutions of higher education and business and industry; and lists resources available to enhance professional learning. (LL)

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY FOR TENNESSEE'S SCHOOLS

State Board of Education

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Introduction

Tennessee aspires to raise the achievement of its students to world class standards. Not only must student learning exceed goals few of our students have ever met, but how students learn must also be changed dramatically. Fundamental changes require that educators have continuing opportunities to learn how to help their students meet world class standards of academic performance.

Professional development is an essential part of effective organizations. Observers of successful businesses have begun describing the idea of the learning organization, one in which continuous learning and improvement occur. Observers of successful schools have noted that their principals and teachers are engaged in continuous learning and improvement in order to enhance the learning of their students. The challenge to policymakers and educators is to create conditions conducive to student and teacher learning in each school.

With the recent adoption of the Education Improvement Act, Tennessee has the obligation to bring knowledge about effective organizations and new knowledge about learning to bear upon the implementation of school improvement initiatives. The legislation provides the framework for innovation by emphasizing educational outcomes and providing a governance structure, resources, and flexibility at the local school level to accomplish the goals of the Master Plan for Tennessee Schools. The Master Plan calls for a professional development policy to provide a framework within which schools can create a climate for learning, development and change. Legislation adopted in 1984 directs the State Board of Education to develop and maintain such a policy.

The Education Improvement Act and the Master Plan envision an educational climate that is dramatically different from that which we have known previously. Both emphasize learning outcomes and include a number of measures to ensure accountability of schools and school systems. Schools are responsible for ensuring that all children learn and have the authority and flexibility to determine how to accomplish this. Professional development is the keystone, the central supporting element needed, to accomplish the ambitious goals of the Education Improvement Act and Master Plan. Professional development that is focused at the school level will be needed to support educators in reaching these goals.

The Policy

Under the Education Improvement Act, schools and school systems are responsible for meeting certain performance standards linked to achievement of students. The new role of the state is to specify required outcomes, giving schools and systems flexibility and responsibility for achieving results.

This Professional Development Policy, consistent with these changing roles, does not require specific steps to be taken by schools or systems. The Policy recognizes that professional development is an essential ingredient in the continuous improvement of schools. The Policy is linked to the Policy for the Principal in that facilitating faculty and staff development is a key area of responsibility of the principal.

1. School Responsibilities:

    a. Establish an organizational structure to identify and implement professional development activities needed to meet the goals of the school.

    b. Provide time and resources for teachers and administrators to work together on common goals; observe examples of good practice both within and outside of the school and school system; participate in workshops and training sessions; and use career ladder extended contract resources to provide professional development related to school needs.

    c. Inform the school system about current professional development activities and about resources needed for professional development.

    d. Take advantage of professional development opportunities offered by the school system, state, higher education, professional organizations and business.

    e. Encourage the development of multiple ways of knowing how well the school is meeting the educational needs of all children and specify outcomes.

2. School System Responsibilities:

    a. Establish policies which support professional development at the individual school level.

    b. Provide mechanisms for communication between the school system and the schools, and between the state and the schools, about professional development needs and opportunities.

    c. Gather information from the schools about their specific professional development needs as part of the needs assessment process, and locate and communicate information about available resources to meet these needs.

    d. Develop partnerships with institutions of higher education.

    e. Review policies regarding testing and assessment and encourage the development of a variety of ways to determine student progress.

3. State Responsibilities:

   a. Identify resources and good educational and professional development practices and provide information about them to school personnel.

   b. Ensure that state policies, rules and regulations provide maximum flexibility to school systems and schools in developing and carrying out professional development activities.

   c. Ensure that professional development needs are included in the needs assessment process and that career ladder extended contract resources may be used for professional development and mentoring of teachers.

   d. Establish criteria for approval of LEA plans for extended contract activities which assure any such funds used for professional development and mentoring of teachers relate directly to identified student needs.

   e. Make training opportunities available to school personnel.

   f. Use innovative technologies to broaden opportunities for professional development statewide.

   g. Promote partnerships among public schools, higher education, and professional organizations in continuing professional development of the state's teachers and administrators.

   h. Work with business and industry to encourage the sharing of resources, expertise, and opportunities for professional development with educators.

Rationale

Professional Development for the Twenty-First Century

Improvement of student learning is the most important goal of the new legislation and the Master Plan. Children learn best when they are actively engaged in learning. While it is clear that Tennessee's teachers and school leaders are committed to this goal, commitment is not enough. Across the country and in Tennessee, many new instructional practices are emerging that have demonstrated improved student success in school. Especially important are strategies that promote success for children who are at risk of failure. In the new competitive economic climate, Tennessee must make a commitment to ensure that all children learn. Professional development focused on improving student achievement can enable teachers to develop and enhance teaching strategies which emphasize problem solving, authentic assessment, working in groups, and undertaking projects connected to real life situations.

Successful schools are characterized by a community of learners comprised of parents, students, teachers and principals who are all engaged in continuous learning and development. Such schools are characterized by a high degree of collegiality and mutual support for learning and innovation by staff members. In such schools, teachers have time to work together to learn and plan in order to improve instruction, and many teachers are involved in networks which support their learning. In such schools, teachers and principals hold high expectations for their students, experience a greater sense of efficacy, and enjoy their mutual work. Individual schools should be the focus of professional development activities; the process of professional development should model the process of teaching and learning that we want teachers to pursue with respect to their students. The challenge is to create the time and bring together resources so that professional development is a normal part of daily work life in schools.

It is important to enhance the capacity of local school systems to promote professional development in each school. The role of the state in providing professional development activities will continue to be important. A new role for the state will be to act as facilitator by identifying new and more effective approaches to professional development, providing resources, and enhancing the capacity of each school system and school to take responsibility for the professional development of its own personnel.

Areas of Focus for Professional Development

The Education Improvement Act and the Master Plan outline areas in which professional development will be needed. Other areas will emerge over time. School systems and schools should determine the areas which are consistent with their goals and strategic plans and give emphasis to the areas which they identify.

Areas identified in the legislation and the Master Plan include the following:

1. Teaching strategies to ensure that all children, especially children at risk and children with special needs, are successful;

2. Use of assessment to improve teaching and learning;

3. Use of technology to enhance learning;

4. School-based decision making;

5. Non-graded, multi-aged classrooms for primary students;

6. Curricular, instructional and scheduling strategies to implement the middle school concept;

7. Curriculum integration;

8. Early childhood education, parenting skills, and family resource centers;

9. Mentoring support for beginning teachers and administrators; and

10. Parent involvement in the education of their children.

Characteristics of Effective Professional Development

Professional development consists of activities designed to advance the knowledge and skills of teachers and administrators in ways that lead to changes in their thinking and behavior in the classroom and the school. A new model for professional development should draw on the growing knowledge base regarding effective professional development programs; these in turn lead to continuous improvement in student achievement. Effective professional development programs share certain characteristics that should be embodied, to the extent feasible, in the plans of schools and school systems::

1. Faculty and staff members determine goals for improvement of their school based on assessment of current performance and share in decisions about what will be learned.

2. Collegiality and collaboration are essential.

3. Professional development activities are based upon what we know about how adults learn and emphasize practical applications in classrooms.

4. Professional development provides teachers opportunities to pursue personal intellectual development and takes into consideration the career stage of the individual teacher.

5. Faculty and staff have time to share and work on new ideas and to reflect upon the new learning.

6. Experimentation and risk taking is encouraged and rewarded.

7. Both teachers and administrators assume responsibility for professional development.

8. Professional development is continuous, cumulative and integral to the life of the school.

Development of the new model for professional development will require a partnership among the state, local school systems, institutions of higher education, and professional organizations. Business and industry can also contribute expertise to assist school systems.

Other Considerations

Role of the State

While the emphasis for design and delivery of professional development is at the school, it is the state's responsibility to encourage and provide resources and information for professional development. The state has six responsibilities. First, the state defines statewide goals for education through legislation and the Master Plan. Second, it makes available to local school systems information on education improvement strategies supported by current research. Third, it provides opportunities for professional development through state sponsored institutes, academies and workshops, and identifies others who can provide consultant services at the local level. Fourth, it creates and supports the capacity for local professional development by creating professional development modules, training trainers, and providing additional resources. Fifth, it assumes responsibility for developing and maintaining computer and telecommunication technology that gives educators access to information and professional development opportunities throughout the state and the nation. Sixth, it encourages and supports faculty at institutions of higher education to participate in professional development in schools.

Role of Local Schools and School Systems

Primary responsibility for professional development belongs to the local school system. Each system must create the capacity for ongoing professional development by providing resources and information to schools and to individual teachers and administrators. The State Board of Education's Master Plan, Teacher Education Policy, and Policy for the Principal all emphasize the role of local schools and school systems in professional development.

School systems should work with schools in planning and implementing a school-focused professional development program. Each school should establish an organizational structure and information system for implementing its own professional development plan, consistent with its goals and school improvement process. School needs should be assessed continuously and adjustments made in the professional development plan. Teacher and administrator learning must be viewed as an integral part of school life and time must be allocated for it. Professional development activities should focus on school-level identification of goals for students and progress being made toward attaining such goals. Schools where teachers and administrators learn are schools where students learn.

There are many professional development approaches that can be employed. Schools are encouraged to go beyond strategies that have been used in the past and to emphasize school focused approaches. Some, but not all, of the possible approaches are listed below.

1. Teacher interaction around problem solving within schools or in networks across schools.

2. Self-generated professional development activities such as study groups, teacher conducted research, and visits to other schools.

3. Schoolwide implementation of innovative practices.

4. Mentoring beginning teachers and administrators.

5. Conferences, institutes, academies, workshops, and teacher centers.

6. Learning opportunities available through computers and telecommunication technology.

7. Cooperative programs linking schools to higher education institutions.

8. Peer coaching.

9. Teaching and school leadership assessment centers.

Schools and school systems are encouraged to experiment with school schedules to allow time within the school day for teachers to participate in team meetings, to meet with and observe other teachers, and to participate in a study of a particular issue (e.g., study groups). The time currently allocated for in-service could provide an opportunity for such collaboration. Release time will be needed during the school year to work collaboratively, to perform mentoring activities, or to observe other teachers. In some cases, providing time for professional development may require that a teacher's class be taught by others. Building level administrators are encouraged to design creative ways to make time available for teachers to engage in professional development. Some strategies include: using substitute teachers and interns, employing a roving substitute teacher one day a week, and establishing "teacher triads" where one teacher could periodically teach two classes, freeing up a colleague to work with a third teacher. Planning time could be scheduled to allow for grade-level collaboration. Faculty meetings could be devoted to instructional issues, with announcements to be distributed in written form instead of consuming meeting time. Schools could adjust their schedules in order to provide for regular weekly in-service periods. The challenge is to make better use of the time that does exist.

Role of Other Organizations

Institutions of higher education and professional organizations can play important roles by making available to educators new knowledge regarding effective practices, and providing professional development opportunities for educators. Business and industry can provide new perspectives by sharing their professional development resources and experiences with educators.

Available Resources

Professional development is a central element needed to accomplish the goals of the Education Improvement Act and the Master Plan. The Basic Education Program (BEP) funding formula generates funds that local school systems can use to support professional development. The higher education funding formula provides funds to colleges and universities that can be used to enhance professional learning.

State and local funds provide for five inservice days each year for educators. The state salary schedule provides additional salary increments for the completion of advanced study in subject matter or pedagogy related content. State law regarding inservice and State Board of Education policy regarding teacher education direct that emphasis be given to assisting beginning teachers and administrators to help them in the first years of teaching and school leadership. The new BEP funding formula provides funding for supervisory positions to be determined in accordance with local priorities; such personnel can be used to

develop the capacity for locally initiated professional development. The State Department of Education provides institutes, academies and workshops which local educators are encouraged to attend. The Department also provides mini-grants to individual teachers and administrators, as do many local school systems or local foundations. Career ladder extended contract resources are available for professional development activities. Colleges and universities offer programs and have expertise that can help educators. Finally, local school systems have greater latitude than ever before in scheduling the time within the school day to create opportunities for professional development activities.

Local school systems are encouraged to use state and local funding for professional development in the areas of focus outlined in this policy and for other staff development purposes designated by the local school system.

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